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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

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**Notice of Availability of the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Draft
Resource Management Plan Amendment and Draft Environmental Impact
Statement for the Northwest Colorado District**

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of Availability.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared a Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Draft Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendment and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Northwest Colorado District (NWD) and by this notice is announcing the opening of the comment period.

DATES: To ensure that comments will be considered, the BLM must receive written comments on the Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS within 90 days following the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes notice of the Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS in the Federal Register. The BLM will announce future meetings or hearings and any other public participation activities at least 15 days in advance through public notices, media releases, and/or mailings.

ADDRESSES: You may submit comments related to the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS by any of the following methods:

- Web site:
https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/lup/lup_register.do
- Email: blm_co_nw_sage_grouse@blm.gov
- Fax: 970-244-3083
- Mail: BLM – Greater Sage Grouse EIS, 2815 H Road, Grand Junction, CO 81506

Copies of the NWD Greater Sage-Grouse Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS are available at the NWD Office at the above address or on the Web site at:

http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/BLM_Programs/wildlife/sage-grouse.html.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Erin Jones, NWD NEPA

Coordinator, telephone 970-244-3008; see address above; email erjones@blm.gov.

Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact the above individual during normal business hours. The FIRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question with the above individual. You will receive a reply during normal business hours.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The BLM prepared the Northwest Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Draft RMP Amendment and Draft EIS to address a range of alternatives focused on specific conservation measures across the Northwest Colorado range of the Greater Sage-Grouse (GRSG). This Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS is one of 15 separate planning efforts that are being undertaken as part of the BLM's and U.S. Forest Service's National Greater Sage-Grouse Planning Strategy. The Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS proposes to amend the RMPs for the Colorado River Valley,

Grand Junction, Kremmling, Little Snake, and White River field offices, as well as the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the Routt National Forest. The current management decisions for resources are described in the following RMPs/LRMPs:

- Glenwood Springs RMP (1984)
- Grand Junction RMP (1987)
- Kremmling RMP (1984)
- Little Snake RMP (2011)
- White River RMP (1997)
- Routt National Forest LRMP (1997)

The planning area includes approximately 8 million acres of BLM, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, State, local, and private lands located in northwestern Colorado, in 10 counties (Eagle, Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Larimer, Mesa, Moffat, Rio Blanco, Routt, and Summit). Within the decision area, the BLM and U.S. Forest Service administer approximately 1.6 million surface acres and 2.7 million acres of Federal oil and gas mineral (subsurface) estate. Surface management decisions made as a result of this Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS will apply only to the BLM and U.S. Forest Service-administered lands in the decision area. The decision area is defined as those BLM and U.S. Forest Service-administered lands and Federal mineral estate within three categories of habitat identified by Colorado Parks and Wildlife:

- Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH)—Areas identified as having the highest conservation value to maintaining sustainable GRSG populations; include breeding, late brood-rearing and winter concentration areas.
- Preliminary General Habitat (PGH)—Areas of seasonal or year-round habitat outside of priority habitat.
- Linkage/Connectivity Habitat—Areas identified as broader regions of connectivity important to facilitate the movement of GRSG and maintain ecological processes.

The formal public scoping process for the RMP Amendment/EIS began on December 9, 2011, with the publication of a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register (76 FR 77008), and ended on March 23, 2012. The BLM held four scoping open houses in January and February 2012. The BLM used public scoping comments to help identify planning issues that directed the formulation of alternatives and framed the scope of analysis in the Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS. The scoping process was also used to introduce the public to preliminary planning criteria, which set limits on the scope of the Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS.

Major issues considered in the Draft RMP Amendment/Draft EIS include special status species management (GRSG specifically), energy development, lands and realty (including transmission), and livestock grazing.

The Draft RMP Amendment /Draft EIS evaluates four alternatives in detail, including the No Action Alternative (Alternative A) and three action alternatives (Alternatives B, C and D). The BLM identified Alternative D as the preferred alternative. Identification of this alternative, however, does not represent final agency direction, and the Proposed RMP Amendment may reflect changes or adjustments based on information received

during public comment, from new information, or from changes in BLM policies or priorities. The Proposed RMP may include objectives and actions described in the other analyzed alternatives or otherwise within the spectrum of alternatives analyzed.

Alternative A would retain the current management goals, objectives, and direction specified in the current RMPs for each field office and the LRMP for the Routt National Forest. Alternative B includes conservation measures from the Sage-grouse National Technical Team Report. Alternative C includes conservation measures various conservation groups submitted to the BLM. Alternative D includes conservation measures the BLM developed with the cooperating agencies.

Pursuant to 43 CFR 1610.7-2(b), this notice announces a concurrent public comment period on proposed Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). One ACEC is proposed in Alternative C. The Sage-grouse Habitat ACEC (approximately 910,000 acres) would include the following resource use limitations if it were formally designated:

Close to fluid mineral leasing; designate as a Right-of-Way exclusion area; close to livestock grazing; allow vegetation treatments only for the benefit of GRSG; and recommend for withdrawal from mineral entry.

Please note that public comments and information submitted including names, street addresses and email addresses of persons who submit comments will be available for public review and disclosure at the above address during regular business hours (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment - including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying

information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

AUTHORITY: 40 CFR 1506.6, 40 CFR 1506.10, 43 CFR 1610.2

Helen M. Hankins

BLM Colorado State Director

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